GOVERNING AT THE FRONTIER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The case of seconded national officials

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Abstract

Studies of executive institutions have largely dealt separately with national and international executive institutions (IEIs). This study unpacks and repacks four conflicting decision-making dynamics that unfolds at the frontier of IEIs – that is, at the institutional rim where national and international executive institutions meet, interact and collide. The empirical laboratory utilised is seconded national experts in the European Commission. The survey and interview data presented demonstrates that the decision-making behaviour of seconded national experts includes a mix of departmental (portfolio), epistemic (expert) and supranational behaviour. The suspicion early voiced by Coombes (1970) that seconded national experts to the European Commission are highly conscious of their national background and that they represent domestic Trojan horses into the European Commission is severally challenged by this study. Arguably, the decision-making dynamics observed at the frontier of the Commission seem less affected by the member-state administrations and the international organisation in which the Commission is embedded, and strongly by organisational characteristics of the Commission itself.

Introduction[1]

Institutions are constantly rifted between unity and diversity, autonomy and dependence. This study argues that the European Commission (Commission) faces enduring conflicts between dependence on the member-state governments (Moravcsik 1998), supranational autonomy (Haas 1958), inter-DG conflicts and departmental rivalries (Cini 1996; Smith 1994), and professional concerns (Haas 1992). The purpose of this study is to illuminate to what extent and how the Commission balances these four dynamics and weaken the dependence on the member-state governments, leaving more space for supranational, departmental and epistemic dynamics. A crucial test of the transformative power of the Commission is the extent to which it manages to weaken intergovernmental behavioural dynamics among individual officials and induce them to supranational, departmental and epistemic behavioural dynamics. An under-researched test-bed thereof is seconded national civil servants hired on short-term contracts and living at the frontier of the Commission (SNEs in Commission phraseology) (Rosenau 1997). The frontier of the Commission incorporates both loosely organised networks and tightly organised webs of committees, agencies and SNEs. At the frontier of the Commission,

SNEs “sort and play out their many contradictions presently at work” (Rosenau 1997: 6; Trondal 2004a). The White Paper on Governance issued by the Commission (2001) assumes that the ‘exchange of staff and joint training between administrations at various levels would contribute to a better knowledge of each other’s policy objectives, working methods and instruments’ (European Commission 2001:13). Couched in more analytical terms, ‘the future organization of Europe involves a struggle for people’s minds, their identities and normative and causal beliefs’ (Olsen 2003:58). Fundamental transformations of political orders are caused not only by organisational reform but by shifting and reorganising behavioural dynamics within existing organisations (Holsti 2004).

The study of international organisations and public administration are largely separate scholarly realms (e.g. Cox and Jacobson 1973; Maor and Lane 1999; March 1965; Simmons and Martin 2003). Moreover, studies of executive institutions have mostly dealt separately with national and international executive institutions (e.g. Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993; Nugent 1997; Reinalda and Verbeek 2004). National and international administrative orders are often portrayed as two separate systems with rather few intersections (Jachtenfuchs 1997: 2). Moreover, beyond single-case studies there is a surprising dearth of theoretically informed empirical studies of the *multiple internal decision-making dynamics* of IEIs, including the Commission (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Gehring 2003; Gould and Kelman 1970; Johnston 2003; Mouritzen 1990; Rochester 1986; Trondal 2004a). The Commission represents the most mature IEI world wide. The Commission also has a long history of integrating member-state administrations into the fabric of day-to-day Commission decision-making, contributing to a “de-bordering” (Kohler-Koch 2005:12) and the emergence of a “multi-level community administration” (Egeberg 2006) at the frontier of the Commission.

Member-state officials may be organisationally integrated into the frontier of IEIs in at least two ways. The first is by inviting member-state officials into permanent and temporary committees at the frontier of the core administration of IEIs (Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2003). The second is by appointing them outside regular recruitment procedures on short term secondment contracts into the core administration of IEIs (Trondal 2004a). The High Autority of 1952 was largely staffed by SNEs from the member-state governments, and the intention of its first President (Jean Monnet) was that the High Authority should rely on a seconded, flexible staff of top experts (Duchêne 1994: 240). However, SNEs have never dominated the Commission staff, but their number has steadily increased in the 1990s, particularly under the Delores Commission, to around 800-900 at present (CLENAD 2003; Trondal 2004a: 71). This study is the first systematic account of SNEs within the Commission. The empirical analysis benefits from a survey study (N = 71) and an interview study (N = 22) among SNEs to the Commission in 2004 and 2005.

SNEs make decisions within the Commission DGs and Units almost on the same footing as permanent A-officials. The dependent variable of this study is the actual decision-making behaviour evoked by SNEs. Arguably, SNEs are rifted between four behavioural logics – intergovernmental, supranational, departmental and epistemic logics. SNEs are multiply embedded and are likely to evoke multiple behaviour logics. They may evoke a government representative (member-state) hat, a supranational (Commission) hat, a departmental (DG/Unit) hat, and/or an epistemic (professional) hat. Each SNE is likely to combine different mixes of this behavioural repertoire in different organisational situations. Whereas intergovernmental behavioural dynamics uphold territorial preferences, concerns, roles and loyalties among SNEs, the latter three dynamics severely weaken the extent to which SNEs represent their home government. Whereas supranational behaviour denote that SNEs have a

strong “cosmopolitan” Commission loyalty and act on mandates issued by the Commission politico-administrative leadership, departmental and epistemic behaviour transcend politico-administrative control from the home government *and* the Commission leadership. Departmental behaviour is guided by administrative rules and procedures codified in the portfolios assigned to SNEs. Epistemic behaviour is guided by professional expertise and the educational background of the SNEs, loosely knit to fixed mandates from the Commission *and* the member-state leadership. These four behavioural logics may be interlinked differently, notably nested, cross-cutting, separate or fused (Herrmann and Brewer 2004:8; Marks and Steenbergen 2004; Risse 2004:251).

An organisation theory perspective is suggested to account for the above four behavioural dynamics. Arguably, the behavioural repertoire evoked by SNEs is conditioned by the five following organisational factors: the organisational composition of the Commission, the organisational composition of domestic government systems, degrees of organisational compatibility across levels of governance, recruitment procedures of SNEs, and socialisation dynamics within the Commission. SNEs represent a crucial testing-ground for the independent impact of *the Commission organisation* because SNEs have multiple organisational belongings and because SNEs are strongly ‘pre-packed’ and pre-socialised before entering the Commission. SNEs are recruited to the Commission on short term contracts (maximum four years), paid by their home government, and the majority foresee a return to past positions in domestic ministries or agencies when their temporary contracts come to an end (CLENAD 2003). Hence, one expectation is that SNEs are reluctant to adopt supranational behaviour and more likely to evoke intergovernmental behaviour. However, while working for the Commission, SNEs transfer their *primary* organisational affiliation from the member-state administration to the Commission. According to the organisation

theory approach outlined *primary* organisations have stronger impact on incumbents than *secondary* organisations. Hence, SNEs might adopt a supranational behaviour due to their primary Commission affiliations. Moreover, SNEs are employed within sector ministries or agencies in their country of origin before entering the Commission and they are often enrolled within compatible Commission units. Arguably, the organisational embeddedness of SNEs in multiple compatible organisations specialised by purpose and process strengthen and uphold behavioural pattern that correspond to their portfolio (departmental logic) and their professional expertise (epistemic logic).

The article proceeds as follows. The next section is sequenced in two steps. Step I outlines four decision-making dynamics. Step II outlines an organisational theory perspective that specifies the organisational contingencies under which each of these decision-making dynamics are evoked by SNEs. The next section presents a rich body of primary survey and interview data on SNEs in the Commission. These data demonstrate that the decision-making behaviour evoked by SNEs contain a mix of departmental, epistemic and supranational behaviour. The suspicion early voiced by Coombes (1970) that SNEs are highly conscious of their national background and that they represent domestic Trojan horses into the Commission is severally challenged by this study. SNEs at the frontier of the Commission seem less affected by their home government and the international organisation in which the Commission is embedded, but strongly by organisational characteristics of the Commission itself.

Theorising decision-making at the frontier of the Commission

Step I: Four ideal-typical decision-making dynamics.

The Commission, like most executive institutions, has an inbuilt tension between different governance dynamics, notably between intergovernmental, supranational, departmental and epistemic dynamics. Organisational stability within the Commission requires balancing these conflicting decision-making dynamics. Organisational transformation implies reorganising existing balances between dynamics by creating new temporary balances among them (Olsen 2005). Behavioural transformation of SNEs implies a weakening of their intergovernmental behaviour and a strengthening of supranational, departmental and epistemic behaviour.

The Commission may be pictured as constantly ripped between national interests, concerns, roles and loyalties and overarching community interests, concerns, roles and loyalties. This tension is not only challenged during large-scale intergovernmental conferences where the future constitutional fabric is negotiated (Moravcsik 1998), but also during day-to-day decision-making processes within the Commission (Haas 1958). The conflict between the concern for national preferences and community preferences is built into the role as a SNE. Despite SNEs have a formally declared loyalty solely towards the Commission and are supposed to act loyally towards the Commission, they are seconded *from* their home government. SNEs have only a temporary enrolment in the Commission, they remain paid by their home government during their stay at the Commission and the majority foresee a return to their home government after the secondment period. Still, SNEs have signed a contract formalising that "the SNE shall carry out his duties and shall behave solely with the interest of the Commission in mind" (European Commission 2004: Art. 7:1a). SNEs may thus activate a dual behavioural repertoire that includes (i) an intergovernmental behavioural pattern, guided by loyalty to their home government, preference for national interests, and intense contacts with their home base, and (ii) a supranational behavioural pattern coached by the top

leadership of the Commission, an internalised taken for granted loyalty towards the Commission, and a preference for "the common European good" (see Tables 1 and 2 below).

The third and fourth decision-making dynamic that is built into the role as a SNE is that between portfolio interests (departmental behaviour) and professional interests (epistemic behaviour) (Radaelli 2001; Smith 2004). Commission officials, including SNEs, are recruited into DGs and units on issue-specific portfolios and are expected to fulfil the requirements of their assigned portfolio. The departmental dynamic predict SNEs to be "neutral, intelligent, generalist professionals who advice ministers" (Richards and Smith 2004: 779). SNEs are expected to evoke classical Weberian civil servant virtues, attach identity towards their Commission Unit and DG, and abide to administrative rules and procedures. This is the Westminster model that sees officials as neutral, permanent and loyal (Richards and Smith 2004: 783). On the other hand, Commission officials are highly educated officials, recruited on the basis of past merits, and with a professional esteem attached to their educational background. The epistemic dynamics predict SNEs to enjoy a great deal of behavioural autonomy. They are assumed to prepare dossiers, argue, negotiate, and co-ordinate with colleagues on the basis of their professional competences and legitimate their authority on neutral competences (Haas 1992). Their decision-making behaviour is expected to be guided by considerations of scientific and professional correctness and the power of the better argument (Eriksen and Fossum 2000). This is the 'Monnet official' who is institutionally autonomous and a high-flying technocrat.

Table 1 illustrates these four ideal-typical decision-making dynamics.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 2 suggests proxies of these decision-making dynamics.

[Table 2 about here]

An organisational theory approach.

This section argues that SNEs are likely to evoke departmental, epistemic and supranational behaviour due to the five following organisational factors: the organisational composition of the Commission, the organisational composition of domestic government systems, degrees of organisational compatibility across levels of governance, recruitment procedures of SNEs, and socialisation dynamics within the Commission.

Organisational compositions

This section argues that decision-making dynamics may be accounted for by considering the formal organisation of executive institutions (Holsti 2004). Arguably, the tensions between conflicting decision-making dynamics reflect the formal organisation of executive institutions. Put generally, behavioural contestation is activated by organisational structures that cross-cuts each other and challenge pre-existing decision-making dynamics. Accordingly, to Schattschneider (1975: 30) "organization is itself a mobilization of bias in preparation for action". Tensions and conflicts among multiple decision-making dynamics within IEIs are thus organisationally contingent. Formal organisations "are collections of structures, rules and standard operating procedures that have a partly autonomous role in political life" (March and Olsen 2005:4). Civil servants live with a constant overload of potential and inconsistent information that may be attended to at decision situations. Formal organisations guide the decision-making behaviour evoked by civil servants due to the computational limitations

among the latter (Simon 1957). Formal organisations are systematic devices for simplifying, routinising, directing and sequencing information towards particular decision situations (Schattschneider 1975: 58). The limited cognitive capacities among civil servants are systematised by vertical and horizontal specialisation of formal organisational charts. By specialising organisations each civil servant is assigned a formal role that specifies what problems, solutions and consequences s/he should de/emphasise (Egeberg 1999). Organisational specialisation lead to local rationalities and local and routinised learning cycles among the incumbents (Haas 2004: 587; Olsen 2005:12).

Political orders are hybrids and inconsistent collections "of institutions that fit more or less into a coherent system" (Ansell 2004:234; March and Olsen 2005:8). Formal organisations contain sub-systems organised according to conflicting principles vis-à-vis the core-system. Organisations tend to accumulate conflicting organisational principles through horizontal and vertical specialisation (Olsen 2005). "The outcome of the game of politics depends of which, of a multitude of possible, conflicts gain the dominant position" (Schattschneider 1975: 60). When specialising formal organisations horizontally, two conventional principles have been suggested by Luther Gulick (1937). First, formal organisations may be specialised by the major purpose served – like research, health, food safety, etc. This principle tends to activate sectoral preferences and conflicts among incumbents along sectoral cleavages. Co-ordination and contact patterns tend to be channelled *within* departmental portfolios rather than between them. This mode of horizontal specialisation result in less than adequate horizontal co-ordination *across* policy sectors and better co-ordination *within* policy sectors (Ansell 2004:237). Arguably, organisation by major purpose served is likely to bias the decision-making behaviour of SNEs towards the departmental logic and the epistemic logic. The Commission DG and unit structure is a prominent example of this horizontal principle of

specialisation (Egeberg and Trondal 1999). The Commission is a horizontally pillarised system of government specialised by purpose and with fairly weak organisational capabilities for horizontal co-ordination at the top through Presidential command (Dimitrakopoulos and Kassim 2005). Domestic central administrations are also often organised according to the principle of purpose (Peters 1995:158). Hence, we see a compatible organisational specialisation between the Commission and domestic government systems. Organisational compatibility by purpose serves to strengthen departmental and epistemic behaviour.

A second principle of horizontal specialisation also present within the Commission is the principle of the major process utilised – like administration, legal service, personnel services, etc. (Gulick 1937). Within the Commission the Internal Services like Legal Service and DG for Translation illustrates the process principle. Moreover, domestic ministries are often organised by process, like ministries of administration, ministries of planning, etc. This horizontal principle encourages the horizontal integration of functional departments and the disintegration of the major purposes served. Arguably, organisation by major process is conducive to departmental and epistemic behaviour among SNEs. The Commission and domestic government systems are primarily organised horizontally by purpose, only secondary by function (Egeberg and Trondal 1999).

Organisational compatibility

Behavioural transformation requires some degree of organisational incompatibility across organisational borders (Egeberg 2004). Certainly, domestic officials entering the Commission building for the first time are likely to discover non-compatible working environments (March 1994: 70). The novelty argument claims that people in new situations are likely to change exiting behavioural practices, notably towards a supranational logic (Hoohe 2005:8). One

example of organisational incompatibility is the rare occurrence of enrolment of SNEs into Commission portfolios that depart significantly from previous domestic portfolios. Another incompatible factor is the multi-national demography within Commission DGs, the fact that day-to-day discussions go in several languages, notably English and French, and the fact that the work place is located physically and temporally distant from the domestic government system (Egeberg 1999). The physical structure of the Commission building, the presence of blue flag with the golden stars as well as the member-state flags may also strengthen the perception of organisational incompatibility (Goodsell 1977). These variables of incompatibility may be conducive to the evocation of a supranational behavioural logic among SNEs. Moreover, the sheer fact that the Commission serve as their *primary* organisational affiliation may foster supranational behaviour among SNEs (Egeberg 2004).

Studies of IEIs have underscored the fact that international civil servants have multiple institutional affiliations (e.g. Marcussen 2002). Notably, SNEs are formally employed by the Commission but paid by their home government. According to Art 7:1a in the new Commission rules for SNEs (2004), "the SNE shall carry out his duties and shall behave solely with the interest of the Commission in mind". At the same time SNEs "shall remind in the service of their employer throughout the period of secondment and shall continue to be paid by their employer" (Art 1:2).[2] Hence, despite being under Commission instructions, SNEs retain their organisational affiliation to their national ministry or agency. In short, SNEs have an *ambiguous organisational embeddedness* accompanying ambiguous behavioural expectations. Moreover, according to the new Commission rules for SNEs, SNEs do not have equal formal rights and obligations as permanent A-staff (European Commission 2004: Art 6).[3] Thus, SNEs are partly detached from their home government and partly from the Commission. On the basis of this *double de-coupling*, accompanying behavioural ambiguities,

one should expect that neither intergovernmental nor supranational behavioural patterns are strongly present among SNEs. SNEs are more likely to act in their capacity as portfolio specialists (departmental official) and/or as professional specialists (epistemic official).

Recruitment procedures

Decision-making dynamics within executive institutions are dependent on the recruitment procedures because different procedures for recruitment tend to bring in different people and keep them more or less autonomous vis-à-vis past constituencies (Mouritzen 1990: 39). Basically, recruitment may be based on a merit principle, as in most Western democracies, and on a quota principle or other systems of patronage or *parachutage*, as in the top echelon of the American civil service (Ingraham 1995: 9). Whereas the merit principle recruits permanent civil servants on the basis of competence, the quota principle typically recruits officials on more temporary contracts on the basis of, for example, political, sectoral or territorial loyalties (Bekke and van der Meer 2000: 281-282; Ingraham 1995: xix). It is the Director or Head of Unit in the relevant Commission DG who select relevant candidates for SNE contracts (EEA 2002:4). Hence, SNEs are not recruited in the open competition process to vacancies based on a written test, but in a more opaque process described by Stevens and Stevens (2001:87) as a "submarine approach" or as an entry in the back door to the Commission services. The vast majority of SNEs seem to be recruited on the initiative of Commission DGs as well as on personal initiatives by the SNEs (Statskontoret 2001:17: 34). The above factors are conducive to departmental and epistemic behaviour among SNEs. SNEs are not only recruited from sector ministries and agencies into compatible Commission portfolios, they anticipate going back to past positions after their Commission career. These factors may activate an intergovernmental behavioural pattern among SNEs, while in Brussels.

Socialisation dynamics

The socialisation variable claims that behavioural practices may change due to individual experiences with particular institutions (Herrmann and Brewer 2004:14). The potential for socialisation to occur is assumed positively related to the duration and the intensity of interaction amongst the organisational members (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 150; Checkel 2001: 26). This claim rests on socialisation theory that emphasises a positive relationship between the intensity of participation within a collective group and the extent to which members of this group take the world for granted (Meyer and Rowan 1991), become victims of 'group think' (Janis 1982), or develop particular perceptions of 'community methods' (Lewis 2000). Socialisation is s a dynamic process whereby individuals are induced into the norms and rules of a given community. By this process individuals come to internalise the norms, rules and interests of the community (Checkel 2005). Socialisation processes are uni-directional in the sense that the socialisator educates, indoctrinates, teaches or diffuses his norms and ideas to the socialisee. Hence, the length of stay at the Commission – or the individual seniority of SNEs – may foster a slow re-socialisation of SNEs towards supranational behaviour (Trondal 2004b).

Data and method

The observations reported in this study are based on a recent survey and interview study of SNEs in the Commission. The survey data results from a postal inquiry conducted in 2004 on a sample of 125 SNEs from different EU member-states as well as from the EEA countries Norway and Iceland. After three rounds of reminders the final sample totals 71, giving a response rate of 57 percent. This response rate is low compared to surveys within domestic central administrations, but higher than recent studies within the Commission (e.g. Hooghe

2005). The initial sample resulted from a short-list of SNEs provided by the EFTA Secretariat and by CLENAD. The final sample covers SNEs from 15 Commission DGs[4] and from the EU member-countries Sweden (N=36), Denmark (N=3), Ireland (N=2), Germany (N=4) and France (N=1), and from the EEA countries Norway (N=20) and Iceland (N=2).[5]

Due to the moderate number of respondents in the survey it is supplemented by in-depth interviews among a sub-sample of SNEs. 22 interviews were conducted in the winter 2004 - 2005 on the basis of a semi-structured interview-guide. The questions posed to the interviewees partly supplements findings from the survey and partly add new observations of the internal life of SNEs. The next section is illustrated with direct quotations from transcribed interviews.

The survey and interview data are based on a systematic selection procedure. This procedure does not allow for empirical generalisations. Still, "[s]mall Ns *can* yield big conclusions" (Andersen 2003:3 – original emphasis). One road to empirical generalisations is by reference to other empirical studies that support or reject our findings. In addition, our empirical observations are interpreted by reference to the organisation theory approach outlined above.

Decision-making dynamics among SNEs

This section measures the behavioural patterns of SNEs by considering their contact patterns (Table 3), their co-ordination patterns (Table 4), their emphasise on proposals, statements and arguments from different government institutions (Table 5), their agreement on concrete statements (Table 6) and their perceptions of *other* SNEs with respect to *their* representational roles (Table 7).

First, Table 3 measures four *contact patterns* evoked by SNEs.

[Table 3 about here]

Table 3 indicates that the contact patterns evoked by SNEs are ranked as follows: departmental contacts (mean=39 percent), epistemic contacts (mean=26 percent), supranational contacts (mean=8 percent), and intergovernmental contacts (mean=5 percent). First, *departmental contacts* are primarily directed within own Unit and DG. Fewer contacts are directed towards other DGs. According to one SNE, "within my Unit, there are waterproof borders between our dossiers" (interview – author's translation). Inter-DG contacts are directed *within* dossiers rather than across dossiers (interviews). Hence, the horizontal specialisation of the Commission services, by purpose and process, is indeed conducive to departmental contact patterns among SNEs. Departmental contacts towards domestic government institutions are primarily directed towards ministries and agencies working *within* compatible Commission portfolios. Only rarely do SNEs contact domestic ministries or agencies in *other* policy areas. Hence, the organisational composition of the Commission and organisational compatibility across levels of government are conducive to a departmentalisation of SNEs' contact patterns. Moreover, departmental contacts may also reflect the departmentalised recruitment practices of SNEs to the Commission. Our survey data reveals that the majority of the SNEs are recruited from domestic agencies and ministries that correspond closely to their current Commission portfolio.

Secondly, the *epistemic contacts* evoked by SNEs are primarily directed towards experts inside and outside the Commission, towards universities and research institutions as well as towards Commission expert committees. Thirdly, the few *supranational contacts* reported are

mainly directed towards the Director of their DG and other international organisations. The interviews, however, reveal that SNEs have frequent contact with their Head of Unit. The Head of Unit is pictured as a gate-keeper inside the Commission hierarchy (interviews). According to one SNE, "I have had four Heads of Unit and the working procedures have changed each time" (interview – author's translation). Finally, *intergovernmental contacts* tend to be directed towards the governments of other countries (14 percent) rather than towards the government of their country of origin (9 percent). Most of the SNEs interviewed agreed that their home ministry or agency seldom initiate contacts towards them (interview). According to one SNE, "I have very little contact with my ministry back home, almost nothing" (interview – author's translation). The following phrase seems to cover the impression of most SNEs: "Out of sight, out of mind" (CLENAD 2003: 26; Statskontoret 2001:17: 11).[6] SNEs receive "very little feedback from capitals … and … in general they had expected to be in closer contact with their employer" (EFTA Secretariat 2000:2). These observations reflect the *primacy* of the Commission for SNEs and the *de facto* autonomy of SNEs vis-à-vis their home government.

Table 4 reveals the mixed co-ordination patterns among SNEs.

[Table 4 about here]

The co-ordination patterns evoked by SNEs are ranked as follows: Departmental co-ordination (mean=48 percent), supranational co-ordination (mean=29 percent), epistemic co-ordination (mean=20 percent), and intergovernmental co-ordination (mean=6 percent). First, *departmental co-ordination* is strongly associated with the horizontal specialisation of the Commission services: co-ordination is stronger intra-departmentally than inter-

departmentally. According to one SNE, "the administrative borders are distinct" (interview – author's transnation). As predicted by our organisation theory approach, intra-DG co-ordination tends to activate intra-DG conflicts. In the Commission these conflicts tend to follow organisational borders, vertically between Heads of Unit and subordinated officials, and only rarely between nationalities. Moreover, there seem to be fierce horizontal conflicts among A-staff and a low level of conflict between A-staff and SNEs. One reason for the latter observation is that A-staff compete for career advancement whereas SNEs often do not (interviews).

SNEs co-ordinate more frequently *within* the Commission than externally towards domestic government institutions, reflecting the organisational composition of the Commission services. Moreover, SNEs tend do co-ordinate towards domestic government institutions working *within* compatible Commission portfolios (departmental co-ordination). *Supranational co-ordination* is mainly directed towards the Director of their DG, the Director General and the Commissioner (and Cabinet) of their DG. "The thing most SNEs comment on is how important the hierarchy in the Commission is" (CLENAD (2002: 43). Finally, *intergovernmental co-ordination* is rare and mainly conducted towards the government of other countries.

Next, Table 5 illustrates how SNEs emphasise proposals, statements and arguments from domestic and EU institutions.

[Table 5 about here]

The considerations emphasised by SNEs are ranked as follows: Departmental considerations (mean=58 percent), supranational considerations (mean=56 percent), epistemic considerations (mean=46 percent), and intergovernmental considerations (mean=9 percent). First, *departmental considerations* are primarily directed towards SNEs' own Unit, own DG and other DGs. Hence, the inter-DG friction often referred to in the literature (e.g. Cini 1996: 153; Smith 2003:140) is observed among SNEs. According to one SNE, "I would say that the level of conflict between DGs is higher than between ministries at home" (interview – author's translation). These observations clearly reveal that the horizontal specialisation of the Commission affects the priorities of SNEs. The departmental considerations reported also reveal that SNEs emphasise considerations from ministries and agencies from other countries that work *within* their current Commission portfolio. *Supranational considerations* are mainly directed towards the Director, the Director General and the Commissioner (and Cabinets) of their DG. Hence, SNEs have a priority profile that is strongly affected by the horizontal specialisation of DGs. *Epistemic considerations* are primarily directed towards individual experts inside and outside the Commission. Finally, *intergovernmental considerations* are weak and mainly directed towards the government of other countries than towards their home government. "We do not think according to nationality here. That is irrelevant. Nationality is only interesting over a cup of coffee" (interview – author's translation). These findings support Shore's (2000) anthropological study of the Commission.

Table 6 presents how SNEs respond to concrete statements presented to them.

[Table 6 about here]

By ranking the mean scores of each statement in of Table 6 the following rank-order appears: Supranational statements (mean=76 percent), departmental statements (mean=55 percent),

epistemic statements (mean=55 percent) and intergovernmental statements (mean=3 percent). First, *supranational* statements strongly reflect community preferences – that is, EU preferences, preferences for the member-states as a group and preferences of the DG leadership. According to Shore (2000: 152), SNEs "find it a wonderfully mind-expanding experience: most who come here want to stay after their secondment has finished. Like the *agents temporaries* ones they get one foot in the door they want to get the rest of their body through" (original emphasis). Hence, a socialisation dynamic towards supranationalism is indeed observed *within* the Commission, not outside it (Hooghe 2005). Secondly, the *departmental* statements reveal a high degree of intra-Unit and intra-DG co-ordination guided by established rules and procedures. Thirdly, the *epistemic* statements are mainly directed towards the professional expertise of SNEs. One fourth of the SNEs perceive that they have behavioural discretion at their disposal. Despite that Commission regulations officially state that "[n]ational experts are to work on the basis of firmly agreed *job description"* (European Commission 2002: 50 – original emphasis), only about 60 percent of SNEs argue that they have *clear rules* within their portfolios.

The interviews in addition revealed a double organisational structure within the Commission. SNEs are guided by formal structures as well as informal structures (cf. Hooghe 2005:20). The following conditions seem to trigger a formalisation of decision-making processes among SNEs: decisions with budgetary implications, contractual issues, and routine decisions guided by standard operating procedures. Sequentially, the degree of formalisation tends to increase when dossiers reach the final vote inside their Unit and DG. Finally, junior SNEs seem to be guided by formal rules of procedures to a larger extent than senior A-staff (interviews).[7] In sum the interviews paint a picture of the Commission as governed by formal written SNE-

rules and informal codes of conduct within *their* Unit (interviews). These hierarchies live side-by-side and are mutually interdependent.

Being embedded into multiple institutions simultaneously SNEs have several representational roles to play. The respondents were asked to evaluate the roles played by *other* SNEs. Table 7 presents how SNEs perceive SNEs from other countries as regards the following four representational roles.

[Table 7 about here]

Table 7 confirms that SNEs perceive other SNEs to play mainly two representational roles – that as an 'independent expert' (epistemic role) and as a 'DG/Unit representative' (departmental role). Of less importance is the role as a 'Commission representative' (supranational role). The role as a 'government representative' (intergovernmental role) is not perceived important to SNEs. This observation challenges previous studies of SNEs that underscore the national loyalties of SNEs (Coombes 1970; Smith 1973; Smith 2001).

Our data demonstrate that SNEs rarely feel a conflict of loyalty between different constituencies, concerns and role ideals. SNEs tend to manage multiple roles (cf. Herrmann and Brewer 2004:12). One SNE argue that, "my loyalty lies here in the Commission" (interview – author's translation). At the same time many SNEs agree to the dictum, "I think in my heart I still represent my self" (interview – author's translation). Hence, the assumed loyalty conflict between domestic and supranational constituencies is challenged by the observations presented in Tables 3 to 7. However, we observe an inbuilt conflict between the role as a departmental official ('DG/Unit representative'), an epistemic official ('Independent

expert') and a supranational official ('Commission representative') among SNEs. We thus see a triangular role repertoire among SNEs.

The SNEs were also asked if, before entering the Commission, they thought of EU co-operation as mainly advantageous or disadvantageous. Prior to the secondment period, a large majority of the SNEs was positive to EU integration generally as well as within their portfolios. 52 percent of the SNEs did not change attitude in these regards during their Commission career. Among those that changed opinion during their secondment period, the net tendency is towards more favourable attitudes towards EU integration. Hence, working as SNE within the Commission contributes to only minor attitude changes. As predicted by the socialisation variable, however, we find a significant Pearson Correlation between seniority within the Commission and the tendency of SNEs changing attitude towards more pro-integration in general (r = .33*) and within their own portfolio in particular (r = .32*). Hence, the longer SNEs have worked within the Commission the more favourable attitudes they develop towards EU co-operation. Some SNEs also have prior experiences from other international organisations, transgovernmental committees and boards, and from the Permanent Representation in Brussels. Moreover, some SNEs are pre-socialised through their educational background (e.g. the *College of Europe*, Brugge) and through a multi-national family background. Prior international experiences may be conducive to supranationalism. According to Page (1997: 60), SNEs generally have contacts with the Commission prior to entering it. Frequently, they "indicate a wish to spend three years in Brussels" (Page 1997: 60). This indicates that supranational identities may reflect processes of pre-socialisation as much as processes of re-socialisation ((Kerr 1973:76-77)).

Conclusions

The Commission is a crucial research laboratory for understanding what happens when conflicting decision-making dynamics collide at the frontier of IEIs. “Like other political systems, the EU is struggling to find a balance between the whole and the parts, between unity and disunity, co-ordination and autonomy” (Olsen 2004: 31). However, the Commission is also an under-researched laboratory for understanding to what extent, how and under what conditions different decision-making dynamics precede others. Located at the frontier of the Commission, SNEs represent a crucial laboratory for studying how organisational re-location contributes to change pre-existing behavioural practices.

This study demonstrates that SNEs in the Commission evoke a triangular behavioural pattern that includes departmental, epistemic and supranational dynamics. The suspicion early voiced by Coombes (1970) that SNEs are highly conscious of their national background and that they represent domestic Trojan horses into the Commission is thus severally challenged by this study (see also Hooghe 2001: 115). Studies of the College of Commissioners and permanent Commission officials support this conclusion (Egeberg 1996 and 2004). Studies of permanent Commission officials also support our claim that full time officials with *primary* institutional affiliations within the Commission, recruited on the principle of merit, are more supranationally oriented than contracted officials with multiple and often ambiguous organisational allegiances, and recruited on less competitive and open procedures (Shore 2000:131; Wodak 2004:107). Studies of other IEIs also suggest that intergovernmental behaviour is not a prevalent behavioural logic among IEI officials, even among IEIs within traditional intergovernmental organisations like the United Nations, Council of Ministers and the Council of Europe (Bartkowski 2005; Checkel 2005; MacMullan 2004: 418; Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland 2005). For example, supranational dynamics are observed within COREPER (Lewis 2000), departmental dynamics are observed within the OECD Secretariat

(Trondal, Marcussen and Veggeland 2005), and epistemic dynamics are demonstrated within the Secretariat of the World Health Organisation (Bartkowski 2005). Henceforth, the dominating decision-making dynamics within IEIs seem less affected by the member-state administrations and the international organisation in which IEIs are embedded, and stronger by the organisational characteristics of the IEIs themselves. The study of SNEs at the frontier of the Commission serves as a critical test of this.

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Four ideal-typical decision-making dynamics

	Intergovernmental	*Supranational*	*Departmental*	*Epistemic*
Behavioural drivers	National government	Community institutions	Department rules and procedures	Professional codes of conduct
Behavioural base	Territorial base	IEI as a whole	Own ministry and portfolio	Own educational background and expertise
Behavioural ideal	'What is in my national interest?'	'What is to the common good?'	'What is formally and legally correct'	'What is scientifically and professionally correct?'

Table 2: Proxies of four decision-making dynamics

The intergovernmental civil servant	*The supranational civil servant*	*The departmental civil servant*	*The epistemic civil servant*
- Loyalty to the nation-state and the home government - Mandated by domestic governments - Guided by domestic preferences and concerns - Diplomatic ethics	- Loyalty to IEIs as wholes - Mandated by the IEI leadership - Preferences for "the common good" - Contacts with and co-ordination towards the IEI leadership - Community ethics	- Loyalty towards own portfolio - Mandated by department and unit rules - Guided by departmental preferences and concerns - Departmental ethics	- Discipline loyalty - Professional discretion and room of manoeuvre - Guided by professional preferences and considerations - Contacts with professional experts - Professional ethics

Table 3: Percent of SNEs who have the following contact patterns.[1)]

Four ideal-typical contact patterns:	
1) Intergovernmental contacts:	
- with the government of my country of origin	9 %
- with domestic ministries in my country of origin working within *other* policy areas than my current Commission portfolio	5 %
- with domestic agencies in my country of origin working within *other* policy areas than my current Commission portfolio	0 %
- with the governments of other countries	14 %
- with ministries or agencies of other countries working within *other* policy areas than my current Commission portfolio	4 %
2) Supranational contacts:	
- with the Director General of my DG	3 %
- with the Director of my DG	18 %
- with the Commissioner (and Cabinet) of my DG	5 %
- with Commissioners of other DGs	5 %
- with the Council of Ministers	6 %
- with the European Parliament	2 %
- with other international organisations	18 %
3) Departmental contacts:	
- with colleagues within my Unit	97 %
- with colleagues within other Units in my DG	56 %
- with colleagues in other DGs	27 %
- with domestic ministries in my country of origin working *within* my current Commission portfolio	6 %
- with domestic agencies in my country of origin working *within* my current Commission portfolio	21 %
- with ministries or agencies in other countries working *within* my current Commission portfolio	29 %
4) Epistemic contacts:	
- with individuals *inside* the Commission whom I respect for their expertise	36 %
- with individuals *outside* the Commission whom I respect for their expertise	27 %
- with the Commission expert committees	22%
- with industry	19 %
- with universities or research institutions	25 %
Mean N	100 % (67)

1) The variables listed include officials having contacts fairly often, or very often with the respective institutions. This dichotomy builds from the following five-point scale: very often (value 1), fairly often (value 2), both/and (value 3), fairly seldom (value 4), and very seldom (value 5).

Table 4: Percent of SNEs who co-ordinate with the following institutions.[1)]

Four ideal-typical patterns of co-ordination:	
1) Intergovernmental co-ordination:	
- with the government of my country of origin	6 %
- with ministries or agencies in my country of origin working within *other* policy areas than my current Commission portfolio	4 %
- with the government of other countries	11 %
- with ministries or agencies in other countries working within *other* policy areas than my current Commission portfolio	4 %
2) Supranational co-ordination:	
- with the Director General of my DG	37 %
- with the Director of my DG	71 %
- with the Commissioner (and Cabinet) of my DG	42 %
- with Commissioners of other DGs	16 %
- with the Council of Ministers	11 %
- with the European Parliament	7 %
- with other international organisations	19 %
3) Departmental co-ordination:	
- within own Unit	98 %
- with other Units within my DG	67 %
- with other DGs	38 %
- with ministries or agencies in my country of origin working *within* my current Commission portfolio	15 %
- with ministries or agencies in other countries working *within* my current Commission portfolio	21 %
4) Epistemic co-ordination:	
- with industry	20 %
Mean N	100 % (57)

1) The variables listed include officials who co-ordinate <u>fairly much or very much</u> with the institutions mentioned in the Table. This dichotomy builds from the following five-point scale: very much (value 1), fairly much (value 2), both/and (value 3), fairly little (value 4), and very little (value 5).

Table 5: Percent of SNEs who emphasise proposals, statements and arguments from the following institutions.[1)]

Four ideal-typical patterns of consideration:	
1) Intergovernmental considerations:	
- from the government of my country of origin	14 %
- from domestic ministries or agencies in my country of origin working within *other* policy areas than my current Commission portfolio	3 %
- from the government of other countries	15 %
- from ministries or agencies in other countries working within *other* policy areas than my current Commission portfolio	5 %
2) Supranational considerations:	
- from the Director General of my DG	75 %
- from the Director of my DG	87 %
- from the Commissioner (and the Cabinet) of my DG	76 %
- from Commissioners of other DGs	43 %
- from the Council of Ministers	48 %
- from the European Parliament	39 %
- from other international organisations	27 %
3) Departmental considerations:	
- from my own Unit	99 %
- from other Units within my DG	81 %
- from other DGs	63 %
- from domestic ministries or agencies in my country of origin working *within* my current Commission portfolio	19 %
- from domestic ministries or agencies in other countries working *within* my current Commission portfolio	27 %
4) Epistemic considerations:	
- from individuals *inside* the Commission whom I respect for their expertise	72 %
- from individuals *outside* the Commission whom I respect for their expertise	62 %
- from Commission expert committees	43 %
- from industry	22 %
- from universities or research institutions	32 %
Mean N:	100 % (62)

1) The variables listed include officials emphasising proposals, statements and arguments from the respective institutions fairly much, or very much. This dichotomy builds from the following five-point scale: very much (value 1), fairly much (value 2), both/and (value 3), fairly little (value 4), and very little (value 5).

Table 6: Percent of SNEs who strongly agree on the following statements.[1)]

Four ideal-typical behavioural statements:	
1) Intergovernmental statements:	
- "I put forwards proposals I think is in the best interests of my country"	3 %
2) Supranational statements:	
- "My proposals are co-ordinated with the leadership of my DG"	67 %
- "I put forward proposals I think is in the best interest of the member-states as group"	73 %
- "I put forwards proposals I think is in the best interests of the EU"	87 %
3) Departmental statements:	
- "My proposals are co-ordinated with all relevant Units and DGs of the Commission"	71 %
- "My proposals are primarily co-ordinated within my Unit"	78 %
- "My proposals are primarily co-ordinated within my DG"	64 %
- "My proposals are often based on existing Commission rules and procedures"	76 %
- "I have clear rules about what to do in my position"	54 %
4) Epistemic statements:	
- "I put forward proposals I think is best on the basis of my professional expertise"	84 %
- "I have discretion to put forward those proposals I prefer"	25 %
Mean N	100 % (60)

1) The variables listed included officials who strongly agree on the statements mentioned. The original variable consisted of the following three-point scale: strongly agree (value 1), both/and (value 2), and strongly disagree (value 3).

Table 7: SNEs' perception of the representational roles evoked by other SNEs.

	Strongly agree	***Both/and***	***Strongly disagree***	***Total***
A. 'Independent expert role'	74 %	20 %	6 %	100 % (69)
B. 'Government representative role'	6 %	33 %	61 %	100 % (64)
C. 'Commission representative role'	39 %	53 %	8 %	100 % (66)
D. 'DG/Unit representative role'	74 %	22 %	5 %	100 % (65)

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Notes

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[2] Additional financial allowances are granted by the Commission. They include a daily allowance and either removals costs or an extra monthly allowance.

[3] According to the old rules for SNEs, "national experts have the same rights and obligations as EU officials…" (European Commission 2002:50). In the new Commission rules on SNEs Art 6 grants SNEs a B-status compared

to ordinary Commission officials. For example, Art. 6:2 states that "[a] SNE shall take part in missions or external meetings only if accompanying a Commission official or temporary agent, or acting alone as an observer or for information purposes".

[4] The DGs covered by the study are: DG Education and Culture, DG Employment and Social Affairs, DG Enterprise, DG Environment, DG Energy and Transport, Eurostat, DG Fisheries, DG Health and Consumer Affairs, DG Information Society, DG Research, DG Taxation and Customs Union, DG Economic and Financial Affairs, DG Trade, DG Competition, and DG Development DG.

[5] Three respondents did not report their country of origin.

6 Similar observations are done in the Council of Europe (MacMullen 2004: 418).

[7] The SNEs were also asked if they put forward proposals on the basis of their political convictions. 86 percent of the SNEs strongly disagreed on this point, illustrating the low degree of party political consideration among SNEs in the Commission. Egeberg (2004) also observes that Commissioners emphasise their 'party role' significantly lower than their 'Commission role', their 'portfolio role' and their 'country role'.